RISE OF THE POLITICAL NOVEL.

TWO STIRRING STORIES OF THE KIND.

ILLUSTRATION FROM "THE BOSS"

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC.

If the much-mooted "great American novel" is a possibility it must revolve around American politics.

Whatever else it may include, certainly an intelligent and truthful treatment of the game of politics as played in some one of the larger States must be a central theme.

It must have to do with one of the States rather than with the National Congress and Washington, because it is in the States that politics is more directly one with the people, and in which that wonderfully amorphous creature of modern creation, the political machine, appears in its iron power.

Washington is cosmopolitan, is the city of all others most unamerican in the United States.

The Representatives and Senators who congregate there, however much they be individually American, are each without the setting, the background, which evolved them into public life. Consequently, as a setting for the purely American book, it will not serve.

Despite the wealth of interest and material for the fiction writer that lies in the political field, both in the great cities and in the great States, it is lamentably true that little has been supplied by the truly good writers giving a fair and glowing picture of the life.

Short stories and articles upon one or another phase of politics, chiefly in New York, have seen the light in the various magazines. Some of them have been undeniably good. But well-constructed novels are few—those that succeed in putting clearly before the reader, in a way that shows an understanding of the forces at work underneath semblances, what may be called the "organism" of politics.

THE TWO POLITICAL STORIES OF THE YEAR.

Two novels that take politics for the central theme and delineate powerful characters typical of that sphere of activity have been published during the last year.

They came out within a month of each other, and each has conspicuous merit. They are, of course, "The Boss," by Alfred Henry Lewis, and "The Mills of Men," by Philip Payne.

The former deals with New York, with Tammany Hall—the marvel in organization, which survived Tweedism, Crokerism, and is entering upon another era of supremacy that doubtless will go down in history as Murphyism.

Tammany Hall, to the usual mind, conveys an impression of all that is iniquitous. Much of that has attached to it. But it stands pre-eminent in the country as illustration of what may be done by compact organization, and, many think, as proof that the success of reform movements, lies in such organization.

The latter has to do with Chicago and Illinois.

It attempts the portrayal of a wider field than does "The Boss" and introduces more types.

Owing to the wealth of the State, politics in Illinois is on a scale second only to New York. In Chicago, though, the city normally is Democratic, it is not so by as large a margin as in New York, and is not nearly so settled in its political persuasions.

The swift movement, the hurly burly, which may be called the spirit of Chicago, enters into its politics, and also has developed out of its newspaper men several virile writers.

One of them is Mr. Payne. From the scenes with which he is so directly in touch he has evolved a novel that pictures all the hurry and the stress of the city and that is a forcible interpretation and study of its politics.

The machine managers, the "bosses," being at the head of the party organizations in the respective States and cities, often have come to hold the chief positions of authority in their spheres, despite that they are not legally officials. Each one of them always, however low his morals, is a man of strong character and unusual personality. Indeed, it may be said that to no other type in American life to-day attaches so much of dramatic and picturesque interest.

Alfred Henry Lewis has the comprehension and the expression with which to interpret such a type, to resolve him into black and white, and does so in "The Boss."

BEGAN IN PRECINCTS AND WORKED TO THE TOP.

He starts his Boss upon his career in the manner in which most bosses begin, as precinct leader—the bottom rung of the ladder in "practical politics." At that time one of the incidents of his life was arrest on the charge of murder—a charge of which he was innocent.

That such a crime should have overshadowed him was a poignant sorrow, from which he could not escape the rest of his life. Anxiety for her husband, the fear that the law might fasten guilt upon him, innocent though he was, drove his wife to her grave, and the same incubus of fear hangs over and torments the daughter, who is brought into the world just at the time. In such incidents lie the motif for the emotional parts of the novel.

Oppressed by a crime that left upon him no stain of guilt, the Boss comes later in life to the daily wanton, and unrepentant commission of the crime against which the people only recently have been wakened to cry out against loudly—use of political authority for private enrichment. The capital offense to him means disgrace; the other, that was "business."

A citizen merely, yet this leader of Tammany gives and withholds franchises, participates in the manipulation of stocks and corporations.

The relations of the Boss to the Police Department, to the legislative department, to the corporate interests, are depicted unsparingly.

No doubt but that every word is true and that the Boss is from the life. Any reader who is to the slightest degree informed as to "how it's done" knows and feels the truth of the tale.

Granted that we must admire his abilities, we must also admit that Alfred Henry Lewis betrays symptoms of an inclination to write merely up to the "good enough" mark and does not endeavor to incorporate much more than the external quality into his work.

He is a close observer, and has a feeling for the "story," but his latest novel at least does not give sign in its construction of any collation of thought or philosophy concerning the opposing forces which are waging their fight to-day.

WELL CONSTRUCTED IS "THE MILLS OF MEN."

Mr. Payne, though a much younger adventurer in the field of letters, has given evidence of a more digested treatment. As previously stated in The Republic book reviews, if some inhabitant of the remote future were to unearth "The Mills of Men" he could gather a pretty fair idea of the sort of time we live in.

Mr. Payne takes his stand in the very thick of the fight, centers his vision upon leaders in the fray, and then reports the struggle.

He has spent no little pains upon his vehicle, his tale—the skeleton—and doubtless worked many a weary hour to induce the people of his book to talk as simply as they do.

But the tricks of the trade are subordinated always to a vivid realization of the vast conflict which he is witnessing, and to the conviction that in the devious ways that underlie appearance the whole procession, passing in review before him, trends upward and onward.

His characters? J. J. J., railway magnate, trustmaker, before whose will all things give way, stands out from the page as one who, if we do not know him personally, is clear in the imagination.

We have read of him in the newspapers. His purposes, his achievements, we question them; but as deeds they are our constant wonder and admiration.

McBride, Chicago's boss, who, being many things to many men, cannot be high in the moral scale, yet, again, is one who has done things, who is a ruler and potentate, not by inheritance, but by the right of the party boss.

And there are a United States Senator, a Governor and a street railway magnate. The book has its women, too, but they are not prominent in the story. Indeed, the chief lack is that very essential "commodity," love interest.

FUTURE FOR POLITICAL FICTION.

No one book or no collection of books can serve as a model or even a key to a new writer's literary endeavor. But a strong note, found by one man, points out the way to a mine, often, of well-nigh inexhaustible material.

So it would seem that fiction now trends toward the political field, to make capital of the conditions now in existence there—conditions that are distinctively modern, being brought about by the tendency to organization.

Urged to do so by the newspapers, a greater proportion of the public nowadays is taking active interest, even participating in politics down to the details of ward and precinct fights.

Consequently, the novelist who approaches this subject from any viewpoint, if he have the eye that can see truly and a pen that paints passably, is sure of a larger audience than ever before. Until now the impression has obtained that readers of political novels were few. The success of "The Honorable Peter Stirling" was pointed as the exception rather than the rule with regard to tales of the kind. But developments of the last four or five years have heightened interest in this particular kind of story, and good fiction picturing the political whirl in good King's English is desired and probably will be forthcoming.

ALFRED HENRY LEWIS.

STEPHEN PHILLIPS'S "ULYSSES"

Some Interesting Facts About How the New Poetic Drama Came to Be Written.

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC.

Stephen Phillips, playwright and poet, was born on the banks of the Avon and received a part of his early schooling at Stratford. He went to London as Shakespeare did, and also became an actor at the Globe Theater, in the company organized by his cousin, Frank Benson. In the course of six years' stage experience he achieved success in various roles, notably that of the Ghost in "Hamlet."

Lyric poetry, principally upon classical and biblical themes, occupied the serious attention of Mr. Phillips long before he quit the stage to make literature his profession. In 1897 high critical acclaim greeted his "Marpessa," which abounds in such passages as—

Thy face remembered is from other days;
It has been died for, though I know not when;
It has been sung of, though I know not where;
It has the strangeness of the luring West
And of sad sea horizons.

Then George Alexander, the London actor-manager, commissioned the poet to write him a play. The result was "Paola and Francesca," which chronologically is the first of Mr. Phillips's dramas. Mr. Alexander's boldness, however, seems to have faltered when it came to producing the piece; and during the four years or so that he hesitated Mr. Phillips wrote "Herod" and "Ulysses" for Herbert Beerbohm Tree. So it came about that Mr. Tree's presentation of "Herod" at Her Majesty's Theater last season preceded that of "Paola and Francesca," now running at Mr. Alexander's St. James's Theater.

Richard Mansfield, it is understood, acquired "Herod" for America, but subsequently his ardor must have cooled. His discovery that Mariamme, the leading female part, was nearly as strong if not quite as strong as the title role is said to have decided him in not producing the piece. Charles Frohman acquired the rights to the play and later on William Faversham will be seen in the part. "Ulysses" ran a long career in London. "Paola and Francesca" and "Herod" are both tragedies. "Ulysses," the third and latest of Mr. Phillips's dramas to emerge in theatrical production in London and the first in this country, is a poetic comedy. A prologue in rhymed heroic couplets shows the gods in session on Olympus, whilst Athene pleads with Zeus for her protege Ulysses.

Calypso this long while
Detains him in her languorous ocean isle,
Ogygia, green on the transparent deep.
There did she hush his spirit into sleep,
And all his wisdom swoons beneath the charm
Of her deep bosom and her glimmering arm.

Zeus permits Athens to go to Ulysses and offer him the choice of remaining with Calypso or returning home through desperate trails, in which he must go "from dalliance to the dolorous realms below," heavily winning his way back to Ithaca. In adjourning this Olympian meeting, Zeus genially calls out:

The cup, bright Ganymede!
Ah, from the first
The guiding of this globe engendered thirst.

Ulysses, being aroused from his spell, does not hesitate. His yearning is expressed in a splendid outburst, beginning:

Ah, that I might see Gaunt Ithaca stand up
out of the surge,
You lashed and streaming rocks, and sobbing
crags,
The screaming seagull, and the flying cloud—
To see far off the smoke off my own hearth,
To smell far out the glebe of my own farms,
To spring alive upon her precipices,
And hurl the singing spear into the air;
To scoop the mountain torrent in my hand,
And plunge into the midnight of her pines.

Calypso, offering to make him immortal, like himself, if he will but stay, Ulysses nobly replies:

I would not take life but on terms of death,
That sting in the wine of being, salt in its
feast,
To me what rapture in the ocean path,
Save in the white leap and the dance of doom!
O Death, thou hast a beckon to the brave,
Thou last sea of the navigator, last
Plunge of the diver, and last hunter's leap!

The descent into Hades, with Hermes for mentor, follows the hero's departure from Calypso's Isles, and in the final act his return, in the disguise of a beggar, to his faithful wife Penelope in the Palace at Ithaca is said to be wrought out with graphic effect.

WHAT THE MAGAZINES ARE NOW OFFERING.

McClure's Christmas number is attractively bound and contains nine short stories, with articles by Ida M. Tarbell and John La Farge for special features. The leading feature is "The Song of the Sawmill" in verse by Florence Wilkinson. Among the stories are "Coming on the Coast," by Colin McKay; "The Pemienta Pancakes," by O. Henry; "On the Trail of the Serpent," by Sidney C. Kendall, and "A Christmas Chime," by Margaret Cameron. Miss Tarbell's contribution is a continuation of her articles upon the Standard Oil Company, the subject being "The War on the Rebate." The writing by Mr. La Farge deals with "One Hundred Masterpieces of Painting." The illustrations are quite up to the high standard of the present day. Some of the artists represented are Ernest Haskell, H. Reuterdahl, Frederick C. Cruger, Oliver Herford, Harrison Fisher, Charles Louis Hinton, Frederick Dorr Steele, A. I. Keller and Charlotte Harding.

The Saturday Evening Post is among the three or four leading weeklies in the land and has, as everybody knows, the distinction of being the oldest. Its age does not prevent its being up-to-date, and its holiday issues will be of the accustomed strength and value. Two notable serials which have been running this year have yet to be concluded. The one is "The Boss," by Alfred Henry Lewis, which will be complete at the next issue. The other is "The Cost," by David Graham Phillips. The editors of this magazine manage to "discover" many literary men of ability, and among them is Mr. Phillips.

The Ladies' Home Journal for Christmas appears under an unusually gay though tasteful cover. Its fiction and articles are of exceptional worth and attractiveness. The leading story is called "In the Light of the Christmas Candles," by Eleanor Hoyt. Its setting is in New York and into it is woven a pretty Christmas love theme. Well illustrated and told with feeling reverence, there is an article telling of the Holy Land entitled "The Story of the Field of Angels." Of consequence also is a short story by Ernest Thompson Seton, "Snap, the Bull-Terrier, a Christmas Dog," and also "The Christmas Dance at The Oaks'," a story of the Old South, by Laura Spencer Porter.

A striking study of a young father and mother and their child, the latter gleeful over Christmas toys, is the subject for the striking face-page illustration of Success. The frontispiece is another Christmastide study that excels the average in feeling and drawing. Its subject is "Preparing the Christmas Plum Pudding," drawn by Olive Rush. Among the special articles are the following: "Does the Higher Education Tend to Happiness in Marriage?" Charlotte Perkins Gilman; "Hobbies Add Spice to Life's Menu," William Matthews; "Notable People I Have Interviewed," Vance Thompson; "Georgia's Grand Old Man," H. Gerard Chapin; "Running for Congress in the Rockies," Forrest Crissey; "The Americanization of a Dutchman," Maarten Singer; "How to Decorate Your Own Home," Josephine Wright Chapman.

No magazine in the United States has a higher standing than the Youth's Companion. For years it has been standard in its class. As the name indicates, its chosen field is juvenile. But the literary excellence of its stories and articles renders it of interest to adults. Its December numbers promise to be up to the high grade which previously has marked its Christmas offerings. Announcements for 1904 include articles by leaders in thought, both of America and Europe. Among the Americans are H. S. Pritchett, president of the Boston Institute of Technology; Andrew S. Draper, president of the University of Illinois, and W. H. Holmes, Chief of the Bureau of American Ethnology. Among the writers of fiction are: C. A. Stephens, Ella W. Peattie, Sheldon C. Stoddard, Arthur Standwood Pier, Margaret E. Sangster, Alice Morgan, Mary Stewart Cutting, Walter Leon Sawyer, Jack London, Norman Duncan, Albert T. Tolman, Homer Greene, Franklin Wells Calkin and Mary Austin.

It may be that you will desire to know what will happen in 1904. As to the information—well, the Reverend Irl Hicks thinks he knows, and he tells what he thinks in the 1904 edition of his Almanac. This Almanac is not without its pretensions. In it may be found figures and statements about the entire solar system from the remotest stars to our own planet. Space is lacking to state all that is included in the Reverend Doctor Hicks's programme and prophecies, but a brief outline of what we may expect in January is possible. The "first storm period" will be on the 2d, 3d and 4th, since it seems that Venus will be out of gear on those days. The second storm period falls between January 7 and 12, due to a conspiracy between Venus, Vulcan and the Moon. Look out for west winds, snow and low barometer. It seems that "Venus is a breeder of great extremes." Then after another reactionary period, which won't amount to much, comes the fourth, from January 18 to 23. This is "the regular Vulcan perturbation." Then we have another reaction, in which we may look for a perceptible rise in temperature. No earthquakes or anything very exciting until March. Then, from March 1 to 4 and from the 7th to 13th, Doctor Hicks promises "seismic shocks" galore.